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Subject: The Week's Top Five on NC Policy Watch

NC POLICY WATCH

Stories & voices
that **matter.**

The Week's Top Five on NC Policy Watch



1. [State School Superintendent muzzles communication from DPI](#)

A directive from Superintendent Mark Johnson to temporarily halt key listserv communications from the Department of Public Instruction has some concerned the order will chill the flow of information from North Carolina's top public school agency.

Policy Watch learned last week of Johnson's command, which comes at a particularly busy time for central office personnel as they prep for the coming school year. This would include sorting through myriad legislative changes including 24 new reporting requirements for DPI.

In Johnson's message, recently obtained by Policy Watch, the superintendent wrote the department would "take a break in the distribution of information to the field and to other lists for stakeholders" following last month's retirement of the agency's longtime communications chief. [\[Read more...\]](#)



2. [Opioid crisis hits Wilmington area hard; lack of public resources hinders response](#)

Wilmington is bustling this summer.

Downtown, horse-drawn carriages take tourists along the riverfront the city advertises as "America's best" where they drink at local pubs, eat seafood, sip cold brew coffee in cafes that also sell designer shoes and limited-edition t-shirts.

But a five minute drive from thriving Princess Street – down 3rd street along the Cape Fear Historic By-Way past monuments to Confederate soldiers and meticulously restored historic homes – you turn onto Dawson Street.

Here dusty curb markets with barred windows begin to replace the hip eateries with seasonal menus, public housing projects the bed and breakfast inns. You'll find few historical markers here – but walk a few blocks and you'll be stepping over discarded hypodermic needles. North Carolina's place in the national opioid crisis is nothing new here – and the news that Wilmington is the top city in the nation for opioid abuse doesn't surprise people. [\[Read more...\]](#)



3. [A nonpartisan confirmation of the dangerous new normal in North Carolina](#)

State legislative leaders this week dismissed a report by their own nonpartisan legislative staff showing the latest round of tax changes will create a budget shortfall of more than a billion dollars in two years, growing to \$1.4 billion two years after that.

The projections came in response to a request made by Democratic leaders in the Senate during the budget debate warning about the impact of the tax cuts, the bulk of which will go to corporations and wealthy families.

The analysis prompted headlines about a looming budget gap and revenue problems and Democratic leaders said it confirmed Governor Roy Cooper's characterization of the Republican budget as irresponsible. [[Read more...](#)]

*** **Bonus Video:** [NC Justice Center director Rick Glazier on education funding and missed opportunities in the state budget](#) (Click to watch)



4. Judging by today's event, protesters are starting to get to Tillis

It's dumb mistake that almost all elected officials succumb to at one time or another, but with a relatively experienced politician like Thom Tillis, you think he'd already know better. Unfortunately, it looks like North Carolina's junior senator will have to learn his lesson the hard way.

And that lesson?

Don't disrespect your constituents.

Oh, there's no doubt it's got to be tempting — especially when the constituents in question are protesters who disagree with your actions on their behalf. But, make no mistake, today's unfortunate action by Senator Tillis and his staff to refuse access to his Raleigh office — even to folks that merely wanted to deliver a letter on the Senate healthcare bill on behalf of the 100+ protesters outside — was a major blunder. (Note: A Facebook report from High Point indicates Tillis has called in the police to keep wild and crazy protesters away there as well.) [[Read more...](#)]



5. DEQ, DHHS at loggerheads again, still bickering over drinking water risks of hexavalent chromium

People living near Duke Energy coal plants — Roxboro, Mayo and Belew's Creek, in particular — don't know whom or what to believe.

In 2015, state health officials said their drinking water was unsafe because of contamination from hexavalent chromium in their wells. Months later, top state health and environmental officials, even Gov. McCrory, assured them it was safe. Then in 2016, in a series of depositions, state health department scientists said that it wasn't.

And now, well, the health and environmental departments are at loggerheads again. [[Read more...](#)]

*****Bonus feature:** [Trial judges gain new, valuable resources in Judicial Fellowship program](#)



*** **Upcoming event on Wednesday July 26:** [Crucial Conversation Luncheon – Prof. Nancy MacLean on her provocative new book, “Democracy in Chains”](#)

Nancy MacLean is an award-winning scholar of the twentieth-century U.S., whose new book, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America*, has been described by Publishers Weekly as “a thoroughly researched and gripping narrative... [and] a feat of American intellectual and political history.” Booklist called it “perhaps the best explanation to date of the roots of the political divide that threatens to irrevocably alter American government.”

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